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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, August 1, 2003, at 4 p.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, 2003

(Legislative day of Monday, July 21, 2003)

COMMERCIAL AIRLINE HIJACKINGS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, I have been trying to find the appropriate wrinkle in this important debate on the Energy bill to share with the Senate something that I heard on the radio this morning that almost caused me to drive off the road.

Given the fact that we have, over the last couple of weeks, just gone through and passed an important bill with regard to the Department of Homeland Defense, given the fact that former Senators Warren Rudman and Gary Hart have compiled a major report continuing to warn us that we are dangerously unprepared to prevent and respond to a catastrophic terrorist attack in the U.S., and given the fact that we are all, every day, reminded of the war on terror and how we are going to protect ourselves, something I heard on the radio this morning makes me wonder that we must not be listening.

According to intelligence reports made public yesterday, terrorists may be plotting suicide missions by hijacking commercial airliners, most likely in the United States, but clearly it could be anywhere in the world. Such a plot is detailed in a memo from our own Transportation Security Administration. I want to quote from it:

The plan may involve the use of five-man teams, each of which would attempt to seize control of a commercial aircraft either shortly after takeoff or shortly before landing at a chosen airport. This type of operation would preclude the need for flight-trained hijackers.

Madam President, the threat that we face from terrorist organizations is still with us ever since we were rudely awakened on September 11. And interestingly, at the same time that we are informed of these potential new terrorist plots, the Transportation Security Administration, in a shocking disclosure that I heard on the radio today, reportedly intends to cancel air marshals on some of our most vulnerable commercial flights.

And if that is not enough, they are reportedly also cutting back on the training for new air marshals. In the wake of these reports, the agency says it has every available air marshal deployed right now and additional resources are being directed to this critical program. I certainly hope so.

The air marshal program was instituted as the front line of defense against would-be hijackers. Just knowing there is someone trained and armed who is usually sitting in the first-class section if somebody is trying to bust forward into the cockpit is a great comfort. What is the reasoning behind these reported cuts I heard on the radio that almost caused me to run off the road? It is that the Transportation Security Administration does not want to pay for the hotel rooms for the air marshals for overnight stays.

What price do we pay for security? That is almost like saying, while we are at it, we are going to get rid of the x-ray machines in security lines at the airports because we want to save on electricity, which, of course, is a ridiculous argument.

The Transportation Security Administration, according to the news reports, says it is trying to save \$104 million. That might be a laudable goal, but I suggest we ought to start looking at the \$8 million program that has already been spent in the Pentagon that has recently come to the fore and has caused such a flap. That is the program that would allow people to gamble on the likelihood of terrorist attacks and assassinations, on which we have all joined in mutual disgust—that there was such a program.

Now having been denied that program, it will not continue, said the Deputy Secretary of Defense in testimony yesterday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and yet that was an \$8 million program.

I have been waiting all day to say—and I thank the Senators for their indulgence—that when it comes to the defense of our citizens, we cannot afford to cut corners. If we do, we will have forgotten the lessons of September 11. I hope the radio report I heard this morning that they are seriously considering cutting back on the air marshals program is not true. Clearly, let's not forget the lessons of September 11.

I thank the Chair.

BUDGET SCOREKEEPING REPORT

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I hereby submit to the Senate the budget scorekeeping report prepared by the Congressional Budget Office under Section 308(b) and in aid of Section 311 of

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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